CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment comprising:

providing at least two modes for viewing the environment having a boundary defining an inside area and an outside area of the environment including:

a first mode for viewing and navigating within the inside area thereby providing an "eye level" view of the environment; and

a second mode for viewing and navigating within the outside area providing an overhead view of the environment.

2. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein the inside area is partitioned, the method further comprising navigating by passing over the partitions by transitioning between the first mode and the second mode.

3. The method as described in Claim 2 further comprising providing one of transparent and translucent partitions.

4. The method as described in Claim 1 further comprising providing user selectable viewing modes.

5. The method as described in Claim 1 further comprising automatically switching viewing mode dependent on user movement.

6. The method as described in Claim 1 wherein the inside area is partitioned, the method further comprising navigating by passing through the partitions while in the first mode.

7. The method as described in Claim 3 wherein the inside area is partitioned, the method further comprising navigating by passing through the partitions while in the first mode

8. The method as described in Claim 1 further comprising providing a continuous viewing perspective when switching between modes thereby giving the appearance of flying over partitions.

9. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment having a plurality of partitioned areas for displaying a plurality of representative images comprising:

predetermining at least one grouping of the images; and

displaying partitioned areas so as to be visibly distinguishable dependent on the image grouping.

10. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising making visibly distinguishable by displaying at least one visible element of each of the areas in one of a plurality of colors and patterns.

11. The method as described in Claim 9 wherein visible elements include partitions, area ceilings, and labels.

12. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising making areas visibly distinguishable dependent on images grouped according to each image's corresponding data object metadata.

13. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising making areas visibly distinguishable dependent on hierarchical grouping levels.

14. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising making areas distinguishable according to hierarchical grouping levels and dependent on location of viewer perspective with respect to the environment.

15. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising grouping according to user selection.

16. The method as described in Claim 9 further comprising automatically grouping according to a preset user interface mode.

17. The method as described in Claim 9 wherein displaying partitioned areas so as to be visibly distinguishable further comprising coloring ceilings associated with each area and making them translucent dependent on the image grouping.

18. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment having a plurality of partitioned areas and the environment having a boundary defining an inside area and an outside area comprising:

providing at least one label for identifying at least one area; and

rotating labels dependent on the user's viewing perspective.

19. The method as described in Claim 18 further comprising translating labels dependent on the user's viewing perspective.

20. The method as described in Claim 18 further comprising providing at least one label in the inside area associated with at least one partitioned area.

21. The method as described in Claim 18 further comprising providing at least one label in the outside area associated with at least one partitioned area.

22. The method as described in Claim 20 further comprising providing at least one label in the outside area associated with at least one partitioned area.

23. The method as described in Claim 22 further comprising providing a selectably non-opaque ceiling such that in an opaque mode, only labels in one of the inside and outside areas can be viewed and in a non-opaque mode labels in both the inside area and outside area can be viewed.

24. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment having a plurality of partitioned areas for displaying a plurality of representative images and the environment having a boundary defining an inside area and an outside area comprising:

lining up a user point of sight with an image; and

initiating interaction with the image.

25. The method as described in Claim 24 wherein the interaction is one of selection and activation of the image.

26. The method as described in Claim 24 further comprising automatically moving the user point of sight closer to the image upon initiation.

27. The method as described in Claim 24 further comprising providing at least one of additional views of the images and providing related multi-media data upon initiation.

28. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment having a plurality of partitioned areas comprising:

providing an active zone where user movements are allowed within at least one area; and

providing an inactive zone where user movements are not allowed in the area.

29. The method as described in Claim 28 wherein the inactive zone is peripherally bounded by the inactive zone except in areas of openings in the partitions.

30. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment comprising:

predetermining a first viewing perspective elevation with respect to the environment; and

automatically adjusting tilt angle of a current viewing perspective dependent on elevation of the current viewing perspective with respect to the predetermined viewing perspective elevation.

31. The method as described in Claim 30 wherein the environment has a boundary defining an inside area and an outside area of the environment and wherein the current viewing perspective is within one of the inside and outside area.

32. A method for navigating through a three-dimensional graphical environment comprising:

tracking user navigation history; and

displaying within the environment a path representative of the user navigation history.

33. The method as described in Claim 32 further comprising selecting a location on the path and automatically moving the user's viewing perspective to the location.